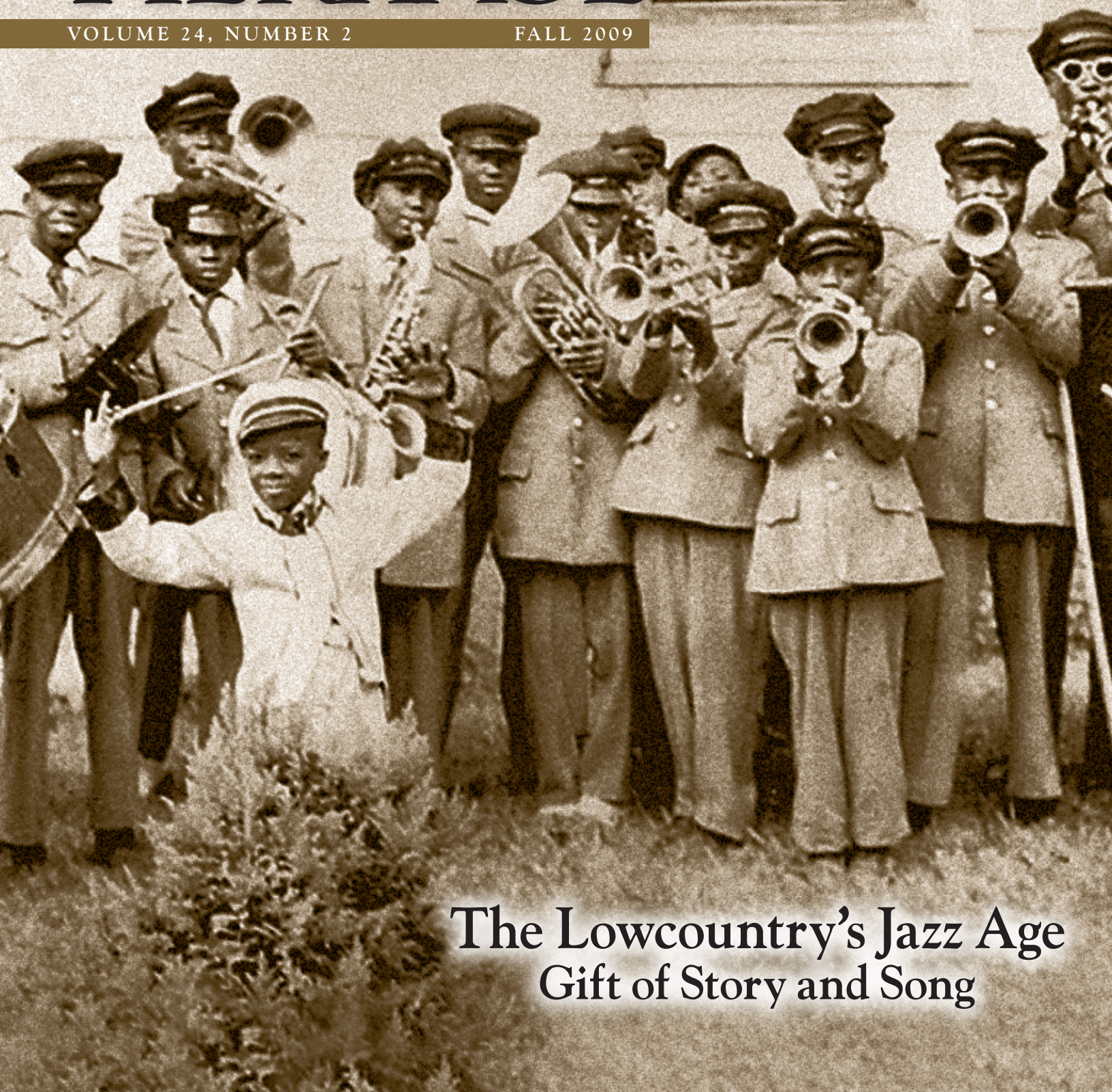


COASTAL HERITAGE

VOLUME 24, NUMBER 2

FALL 2009



The Lowcountry's Jazz Age
Gift of Story and Song

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Sometime during the 1930s, this Jenkins Orphanage Band played in Schenectady, New York, as part of a fundraising tour. The Jenkins Orphanage, founded in Charleston, established several bands to teach black youngsters to read and play music. Some band members later played in internationally famous jazz orchestras.

PHOTO/CHARLESTON JAZZ INITIATIVE/REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION
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Coastal Heritage is a quarterly publication of the S.C. Sea Grant Consortium, a university-based network supporting research, education, and outreach to conserve coastal resources and enhance economic opportunity for the people of South Carolina. Comments regarding this or future issues of **Coastal Heritage** are welcomed at John.Tibbetts@scseagrant.org. Subscriptions are free upon request by contacting:

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SUBSISTENCE. Men gathered oysters by hand at low tide near Beaufort, South Carolina, in 1939.
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The Lowcountry's Jazz Age

Gift of Story and Song

by John H. Tibbetts

The Roaring Twenties didn't roar in rural South Carolina. Instead, silence fell across abandoned fields and farmsteads. While New York and Chicago scaled heights of Jazz Age prosperity and extravagance, South Carolina was visited by calamities that shattered its agricultural economy.

Along the coast, the once-dominant rice planters had already lost their final battle against natural disasters and a changing marketplace. The last stand of South Carolina rice had been destroyed by a 1911 hurricane. Bankrupt plantations returned to wildness, the dikes broken and the fields filled with weeds. Grand plantation homes stood empty until wealthy northerners, with names such as Carnegie, Vanderbilt, and Baruch, bought the former rice estates for

winter hunting retreats.

Many Gullah people—former slaves and their descendents who owned small land parcels—stayed on as subsistence farmers and fishermen, harvesting oysters, shrimp, and fish in lowcountry estuaries. Others moved to Charleston or Savannah, finding jobs as longshoremen or low-wage laborers. In town or countryside, the Gullah people preserved more of their African heritage—music, food, land use, language, and spiritual practices—than any other black population in the United States. Their creole language, for instance, is a blend of English words and African grammar.

In the early twentieth century, many Gullah people continued working as seasonal field hands, picking cotton for the white landlords who

remained. But, in 1920, South Carolina farmers suffered a severe drought and a sudden collapse of cotton prices. The following year, boll weevils devastated sea-island cotton, an important lowcountry cash crop.

Then the pests nearly wiped out short-staple cotton, cultivated in the uplands, in 1922. Soon after that disastrous harvest, more than 50,000 black farmers left the state, many heading North. Jim Crow laws and racially motivated attacks also drove African-Americans out of South Carolina, especially in the years after Gov. Cole Blease (1911-1915) praised lynching as “necessary and good.”

Although the Twenties were hard times for the Gullah people, a period of disruption and loss, their distinctive folk culture became a subject of

national fascination.

DuBose Heyward and Julia Peterkin, members of white, aristocratic South Carolina families that had once owned slaves, found acclaim for their frank, vivid storytelling about the Gullah. In 1925 and 1926, Heyward and Peterkin, respectively, each published a first novel, surprise best sellers, that brought to life emotionally rich black characters.

In Heyward and Peterkin's fiction, black characters are shown as thinking, feeling people with universal desires, joys, and sorrows. This was revolutionary at the time. Almost without exception, blacks had been portrayed in southern fiction only as loyal servants or as buffoons for comic effect.

Heyward and Peterkin's storytelling "opened a door of understanding" about Gullah culture to a larger American audience, says Michael Allen, an education specialist with the National Park Service. "But they also brought their own background and mores, which would have allowed them to miss some things. They might not have reached real depth because they were not inside Gullah culture." Allen, of Gullah descent, has spent almost three decades examining how African-Americans have contributed to low-country culture and development.

Public fascination with black folklife, however, was short-lived.



Heyward and Peterkin continued writing about the Gullah people as the Jazz Age ended with the stock market crash of 1929, but when the Great Depression deepened, reading tastes changed. By 1932, Peterkin had stopped writing fiction. "Julia would say, 'I'm done with all that,'" recalls

her daughter-in-law Genevieve Peterkin. In Heyward's case, he had completed his best work by the mid-1930s.

For the next several decades, Gullah people almost disappeared from American storytelling, though they became a focus of intense scholarly interest. In 1949, Lorenzo Dow Turner published his classic work *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect*, arguing that African languages had been one of the origins of the Gullah language. A strong African connection to the lowcountry attracted a stream of

HERITAGE. The National Park Service (NPS) is developing a management plan for the Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor (map above). Michael Allen (left), an education specialist with the NPS, shown here at Fort Moultrie Visitor Center's "African Passages" exhibit, has spent almost three decades shedding light on Gullah contributions to lowcountry culture. PHOTO/WAIDE SPEES



academic researchers—anthropologists, sociologists, ethnographers, folklorists, linguists, and archaeologists—to Gullah studies.

But this scholarship remained in academic journals and books until the late 1990s when historians, educators, and activists revived broader interest in this unique culture. Drayton Hall and Middleton Place, two nationally known plantations, created exhibits and other programming about African-American history, showing how slaves lived and worked there.

The National Park Service has been a leader in re-introducing Gullah folklife to visitors and lowcountry residents. Today, the park service is developing a management plan for the Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor, which extends from Wilmington, North Carolina, southward through coastal South Carolina, to Jacksonville, Florida (see map on opposite page). The planning effort is expected to take three years. The Gullah people live mostly in South Carolina, and the Geechee in Georgia; some say that Geechee is a term for Gullah.

The heritage corridor is part of a larger effort of African-Americans to tell their own stories. “There were generations of people who were told that they were not part of the American journey,” says Allen. “We want Gullah people to understand that their ancestors helped to shape the destiny of this country.”

THE GENTLEMAN NOVELIST

At age 18, DuBose Heyward took a job in the waterfront district as a cotton checker for a steamship line. The waterfront was a rough place with tenements, wharves, bars, bordellos, and Baptist ministers preaching against sin. Young Heyward absorbed it all. Gullah dockworkers especially impressed him with their feats of stamina, perhaps because he was physically weakened by illness most of his life. “Heyward was in awe of the Negroes’ physical strength; their

immense power seemed mythic to him,” writes biographer James M. Hutchisson, a professor of English at The Citadel.

Born in 1885 in Charleston, DuBose Heyward was the sickly first-born child of an impoverished young couple with distinguished South Carolina lineages. His mother’s family once owned hundreds of slaves but lost their fortune in the Civil War. On his paternal side, DuBose Heyward’s great-



DuBose Heyward.
PHOTO/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

great-grandfather, Thomas, signed the Declaration of Independence. The Heywards were also well-off planters until they lost everything in the Civil War.

Although DuBose Heyward was raised in relative poverty, his family name still mattered in Charleston society, and he was expected to behave in a manner befitting a well-born southerner in that notoriously class-obsessed city.

At age 18, Heyward was struck by polio, which left him with weakened shoulder and arm muscles and a gaunt torso. Later, he contracted painful arthritis in his hands, which deformed them. He was also a victim of a typhoid epidemic, which invalidated him for 18 months, and then he contracted pleurisy that forced him to an Arizona sanitarium for two years. Yet he was a hard, productive worker throughout his adult life.

Partnering with a friend, Heyward as a young man opened an insurance office in Charleston, and their business flourished. In his spare time, he

was producing short stories and poems with notions of becoming a professional writer. He had the good fortune to find a mentor in John Bennett, a successful children’s book author and Ohio native who had done extensive research on Gullah folklore.

Gullah culture, although distinctive, was intertwined with mainstream black culture. In 1958, Ralph Ellison, the novelist and essayist, defined “American Negro culture” as being “expressed in a body of folklore, in the musical forms of the spirituals, blues, and jazz; an idiomatic version of American speech (especially in the southern United States); a cuisine; a body of dance forms; and even a dramaturgy which is generally unrecognized as such because it is still tied to the more folkish churches.”

Still, Ellison pointed out cross-fertilizations between white society and mainstream black society. “We did not develop as a people in isolation,” he once said. “We developed within the context of white people.”

The Gullah people, however, were unusual; during slavery they had little contact with whites. Planters, susceptible to malaria, stayed clear of rice fields and coastal wetlands during “fever season,” leaving the Gullah people, who had some resistance to the disease, alone.

Following the Civil War, the Gullah acquired small land parcels from the bankrupt plantations where they had been held in bondage, and for decades many remained in these quiet enclaves, holding on to their folkways, while others moved to town.

DuBose Heyward from his earliest days had frequent contact with Gullah people, a black majority in Charleston, though as a young adult he doubted how well he really knew them. A Gullah servant helped raise Heyward, and in his youth DuBose supervised laborers on his aunt’s plantation. He admired the Gullah’s brilliant improvisations in spirituals and jazz.

And he observed men who captained small vessels collectively called the “mosquito fleet” that sailed every



LANDMARK. *Gloria Stovall waits for a ride to church along downtown Charleston's Cabbage Row, a locale that DuBose Heyward immortalized as Catfish Row.*

PHOTO/WADE SPEES

day in good weather out of the harbor. Fishermen caught blackfish, porgy, whiting, and summer trout, which they sold to Gullah hawkers who pushed carts through the streets, shouting out their wares. Porgy was considered particularly tasty, inspiring a peddler's chant:

Porgy walk

Porgy talk

Porgy eat wid a knife and fawk

Porgy-ee-ee

Porgy became the protagonist's name in Heyward's first novel, published in 1925. The story is set in a fictitious Catfish Row (based on the real-life Cabbage Row) in Charleston. Heyward's *Porgy* is a story of a crippled street beggar. He falls in love with a cocaine addict and prostitute named Bess, who attempts to go straight. By the novel's conclusion, she has lost the battle. Bess' supplier, Sportin' Life, gives her "happy dust" and spirits her away to Savannah, leaving Porgy alone with his grief. The novel is an affecting portrait of a tormented man who lives passionately within an almost completely self-contained Gullah society.

In *Porgy*, whites hold every lever of power in a city rigidly demarcated by race. Whites often can't fathom the apparently inexplicable behavior of Gullah people, who live by their own customs, rules, and spiritual beliefs. At best, whites look upon Gullah folk with amused condescension or baffled resignation; at worst, blacks are violently bullied.

House servants and blacks with connections to white families are protected from the crueler excesses of white authority. African-Americans without such ties must fend for themselves. They usually have darker skin, perform the hardest labor, and speak Gullah as a first or only language.

In his 1929 novel, *Mamba's Daughters*, Heyward describes Charleston as a city where blacks were divided "into two general classes: the upper, consisting of those who had white folks, belonged to the negro quality, and enjoyed a certain dolorous respectability; and the lower class, members of which had no white folks and were little better than outcasts."

Porgy and his neighbors who occupy a Charleston slum are indeed outcasts subjected to routine humiliation and arbitrary imprisonment by police. Even so, their Gullah folklife survives with an undiminished fierceness of spirit. Porgy is resourceful and courageous, but his social and economic disadvantages are crushing, and in the end he is a tragic figure. Heyward's era was scarred by Jim Crow segregation and brutal living conditions for many blacks, yet he remained respectful of Gullah culture.

"*Porgy*," notes Hutchisson, "was the first major southern novel to present blacks realistically, rather than in the stereotyped roles of happy darkies or loyal body servants."

THE PLANTATION MISTRESS

Willful, imperious, and self-absorbed, the novelist Julia Peterkin often challenged the patience of her family and friends. She had been brought up to be a southern lady, but

she was restless in that role and longed to break free. She needed every bit of her nerve and discipline to build a career as a serious novelist in a time and place that discouraged women from taking chances in the wider world.

Born in 1880, Julia Mood was the daughter of a prominent South Carolina physician who ignored her as she grew up, banishing her to live with relatives. She adored her father and hungered for his approval.

At age 23, Julia married Willie Peterkin, who ran a 1,500-acre cotton plantation for his father in Calhoun County in the midlands. Julia was not to the manor born; she was a town girl. Before the Civil War, some ancestors on her father's side had been slaveholding planters. But Julia had scant acquaintance with plantation life, and she was unsure how to help her new husband manage the huge Peterkin estate named Lang Syne.

Lang Syne was a place where 500 field hands and servants spoke Gullah, believed in conjures and spirits and Christ's divinity all at once, and labored under conditions that had changed little since the end of the Civil War. Most Gullah people lived near the South Carolina coast where they had labored on rice plantations, but they could also be found at Lang Syne in the midlands.

During her first 15 years as a plantation mistress, Peterkin had a



Julia Peterkin.

PHOTO/DORIS ULMANN/SOUTH CAROLINA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

tutor—a house servant named Lavinia Berry—who explained how things really worked at Lang Syne. Blacks received wages, food, clothing, and shelter for their labor, while in turn they expected the white landowner to fulfill a number of roles from nurse to judge to banker.

Biographer Susan Millar Williams, a professor of English at Trident Technical College, describes Lavinia Berry's advice: "As plantation mistress, [Julia Peterkin] must take it upon herself to settle arguments, help people who were in trouble with the law, and give everyone gifts of money, clothing, and furniture. In return...the people would treat her like a queen."

From her servants, Julia Peterkin learned how to keep a garden and raise ducks, turkeys, and guinea hens. Field hands showed her how to make wine, to pickle and preserve. She was taught how to fish, to ride and shoot, and to bake and sew. For 20 years, she paid close attention to Gullah folk life, eavesdropping on stories of fights, romantic entanglements, good-luck charms, and omens.

After Julia raised her only child, William, she grew impatient with Lang Syne's isolation. Her marriage had settled into a mutual, respectful distance; she had little in common with her reserved husband.

Peterkin began traveling by train to Columbia for piano lessons, though she quickly realized she had no talent for music. Her piano teacher, however, was intrigued by her stories of the Gullah people and suggested she write them down.

With her characteristic drive, Peterkin attacked a new goal: learning how to write for publication. She took a correspondence course in fiction writing, sent letters to leading literary figures in hopes of gaining their sponsorship, and wrote short stories about the Gullah people she knew at Lang Syne.

From 1924 to 1932 she published a book of short stories, *Green Thursday*; her first novel, *Black April*; her second, *Scarlet Sister Mary*, which won the



Genevieve Peterkin said of her mother-in-law Julia Peterkin: "She was a very dramatic person. When she told a story, it was a good story." PHOTO/WADE SPEES

Pulitzer Prize; and finally her third, *Bright Skin*. It was a remarkably rapid ascent to public acclaim as a novelist.

Peterkin was a gifted storyteller, though she had only one subject: the Gullah people. Her attempts at writing fiction about white plantation society fell flat and never found a publisher. Perhaps the subject matter was too close to her personal experience.

Her published stories and novels were "near-factual" accounts of events among the Gullah people of Lang Syne, according to biographer Millar Williams. Yet she located her characters in the rural lowcountry—in communities along rivers and creeks of the Waccamaw Neck, where she owned a ramshackle summer cottage on Murrells Inlet.

There whites and blacks worked in close proximity, harvesting seafood from Murrells Inlet for their supper tables. South Carolina's rural coast was isolated to a degree that's hard to comprehend today. Rivers cut off sea islands from the mainland. Deep forests and bad roads separated mainland villages from larger towns and cities. Even major rivers—the lower Savannah, lower Cooper, and Santee—lacked bridges.

In Peterkin's novels, Gullah people are linked to the outside world

only by river-borne trade. Her characters have food and shelter and money for small purchases, but young people are restless, leaving their rural homes for town.

Whites in Peterkin's short stories and novels appear just briefly or off-stage; they are usually remote, chilly figures indifferent to the realities of black life.

Peterkin's Gullah characters, however, are vibrantly alive, driven by strong emotions. They work hard, rest, pray, quarrel, harshly judge or love one another, and compete for status, power, and sexual partners. Some are selfish; others are selfless. In other words, they behave as people do everywhere. That was startling news for those white readers who had never acknowledged the humanity of African-Americans. Donald Davidson, a leading literary critic, called Peterkin's *Black April* "the first genuine novel in English of the Negro as a human being."

FINDING INSPIRATION IN JAZZ

During the Twenties, many American artists and intellectuals, including Peterkin and Heyward, were looking to their own country's folk resources for inspiration rather than to European civilization, which seemed morally broken and corrupt after the catastrophe of World War I. Some artists were especially excited by jazz (often called "ragtime" or "blues"), a popular music reflecting an uninhibited post-war era in its rhythms and daring improvisations. New radio stations were constructed across the country, and many northerners for the first time heard the genius of cornetist and bandleader Louis Armstrong.

How did jazz emerge? During the antebellum era, southern slaves blended European songs and language with African musical traditions, particularly drumming, and out of this synthesis they fashioned spirituals, field hollers, chants, work songs, and the blues. After the Civil War, southern blacks played drums and horns in

militia bands, military bands, community bands, and marching bands in Charleston, New Orleans, Savannah, Mobile, and Memphis. By the late nineteenth century, black musicians were employing military instruments and various musical styles, plus minstrel traditions, to create ragtime, a syncopated musical form.

"Jazz is a totally American music," says Jack McCray, an author, jazz columnist for the *Charleston Post and Courier*, and producer of the Charleston Jazz Orchestra. "It's Africa meeting Europe—African musical principles meeting European melodies and instruments."

A Charleston institution provided a seedbed for jazz on the national scene. The Jenkins Orphanage (Orphan Aid Society), now known as the Jenkins Institute for Children, was founded in 1891. The orphanage taught various trades such as printing and shoemaking, but it also established several bands to teach black youngsters to read and play all kinds of music, though not primarily jazz. In their own time the children could "swing" with their instruments, especially at night in the dormitories.

Jenkins bands performed around the country and in Europe. "They



Jack McCray.
PHOTO/WADE SPEES

were very polished, very sharp, and they knew what they were doing," says McCray. "These guys were professionally trained and could read music." Some band members later became section leaders with internationally famous jazz orchestras led by Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Lionel Hampton, and Count Basie.

African-Americans brought their music with them as they fled the states of the former Confederacy in the early twentieth century, especially to New York and Chicago. An artistic movement called the Harlem Renaissance emerged in the Twenties, and jazz was one of its driving forces. "New York and Chicago were the big stages for jazz, but this was a southern music," says McCray.

LEGACY OF *PORGY AND BESS*

One great artistic legacy of low-country life in the 1920s and '30s is the opera *Porgy and Bess*, which eventually became part of the standard operatic repertoire in the United States. A number of its extraordinary songs, including "Summertime," are jazz standards performed around the world.

*Summertime, and livin' is easy;
Fish are jumpin', and the cotton is high.*

Porgy and Bess was created by an unusual foursome: a pair of white southern storytellers, husband and wife, who were inspired by stories and songs of Gullah people; and two brothers, New York songwriters, who admired Gullah music themselves.

Not long before DuBose Heyward published his first novel, *Porgy*, he married Dorothy Kuhns who became his close creative adviser and at times full partner in his work. *Porgy*, Dorothy told her husband, could be developed into a theatrical play, but DuBose resisted the idea. Perhaps he couldn't see how his novel might translate to the stage. Secretly she wrote a first draft based on his novel and showed it to DuBose, and he was won over. Together, they wrote the drama *Porgy: the Play*.

In September 1926 the Heywards arrived in New York, planning to assist in a new theatrical production. Determined to introduce an innovation into American theater, they insisted that black actors represent black characters in *Porgy*. This was a shocking demand at the time. In American theater, whites in blackface had always played Negro characters in serious plays.

The Heywards faced resistance, but finally in fall 1927 *Porgy* premiered in New York, where it won strong reviews and ran for more than 350 performances. The production used more than 60 black performers and, Hutchisson writes, "established an important precedent for black actors" on Broadway in dramatic roles. The Jenkins band of Charleston provided



SWINGING SULTANS. For decades, William Louis Gilliard and the Royal Sultans band, known for excellent musicianship, was an important part of the Charleston jazz tradition.

PHOTO/AVERY RESEARCH CENTER/REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION FROM *CHARLESTON JAZZ* BY JACK MCCRAY.



ON BROADWAY. *Porgy and Bess*, which premiered in New York in 1935 (above), synthesized jazz, Gullah spirituals and language, and European classical music and opera. An original playbill (right) shows Porgy in his goat cart on Catfish Row.

PHOTO/SOUTH CAROLINA HISTORICAL SOCIETY. PHOTO OF PLAYBILL/WADE SPEES/DUBOSE HEYWARD PAPERS/SOUTH CAROLINA HISTORICAL SOCIETY



instrumental music for 11 traditional spirituals sung during the play's Broadway run.

The success of the Heywards' play attracted the attention of George Gershwin, a brilliant young composer. For years DuBose sought to convince Gershwin to collaborate on an opera based on his and Dorothy's drama. But the composer was always too busy with other projects.

Finally, after six years, Gershwin was free of other obligations. DuBose purchased a Folly Beach cottage that he described as "beautifully placed in a grove of palmettos, pines, live oaks," and there, in 1933, he began writing the libretto for *Porgy and Bess*, today widely regarded as the most

important American opera of the twentieth century.

Heyward's creative partners were George Gershwin, who wrote the opera's music, and George's brother, Ira, who co-wrote song lyrics with DuBose.

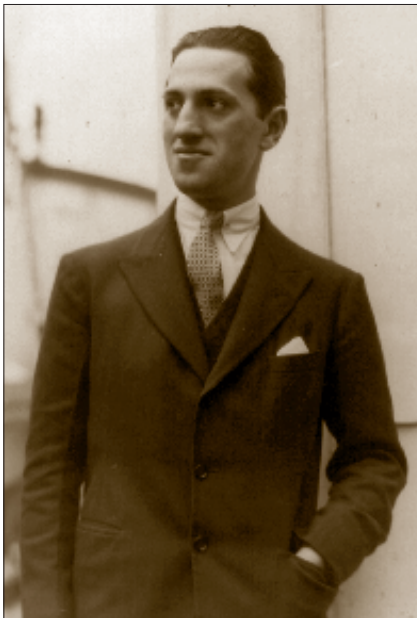
In *Porgy and Bess*, this team synthesized a variety of influences—jazz, Gullah spirituals and language, and European classical music and opera—into a new form that George Gershwin called a "folk opera."

For five weeks during the summer of 1934 George Gershwin and DuBose worked together at Folly Beach, visiting numerous churches and meeting houses on nearby James Island where they listened to Gullah spirituals.

Their lowcountry excursions provided an "inexhaustible source of folk material" for their opera, Heyward later recalled.

"Gershwin went to black churches," says McCray, "to experience the ecstatic spiritualism and shouts that he had heard about."

Porgy and Bess premiered in New York in the fall of 1935 and featured a cast of classically trained African-American singers. The opera, however, was a financial disaster. Black newspapers attacked it, arguing that the opera perpetuated stereotypes. In 1952-53, however, the folk opera was revived, drawing high praise from Duke Ellington, jazz's greatest composer.



George Gershwin.
PHOTO/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

In 1954, the Dock Street Theatre of Charleston planned a production of *Porgy and Bess* that was intended to open at County Hall with an all-black cast. It would have been the opera's first production in the southern United States. But South Carolina law prohibited mixing of the races in "places of amusement," so the audience would have been required to be segregated. The production was never mounted.

Finally, in 1970, *Porgy and Bess* was performed in Charleston on the 300th anniversary of the city's founding. The cast, except for the principals, included local amateurs, and the audience at last was integrated.

LEADING VOICES

For a time in the late 1920s and early '30s, DuBose Heyward and Julia Peterkin were acknowledged as leading voices of the southern black folk experience. How did two white aristocrats achieve that distinction? One answer is that Heyward and Peterkin wrote about black folk life at a time when many African-American writers were discouraged from doing so.

It was common for educated blacks to reject folkways—food, language, music—that were closely asso-

ciated with slavery. In Charleston, "town blacks" derided the Gullah language as "broken" English, although now scholars recognize Gullah as a fully mature creole language. In the eyes of many educated blacks, folk culture was old-fashioned, backward, distasteful, and crude—in short, an embarrassment.

DuBose Heyward illustrates these tensions in his novel *Mamba's Daughters*. In one scene a pair of sophisticated young African-Americans—a man and a woman—stop outside a poor, folk church in Charleston where the congregation is singing the spiritual "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" with intense emotion and harmonic creativity.

Heyward describes the music flooding into the street: "The air rocked to a deep solid chorus, yet a chorus of individuals each creating his own part—shaving harmonies with fractional notes so fine and so spontaneous that no written page could ever capture and prison the sound...The rhythm beat in waves against the soft spring night."

The young woman, listening, is thrilled by the singers' skill and passion. But her companion, the young man, is scornful of their emotionally charged Gullah style. It's not the song itself that offends him, but a perceived lack of restraint in performance. He says, "Oh, that's all right for these ignorant negroes, but where would we be if we stopped at that? We've got to go beyond it."

It was a time when any author—white or black—who portrayed African-American folk culture could be accused of undermining the success, against all odds, of the black middle class. During the Twenties and Thirties, some black writers, such as Langston Hughes and Zora Neale

Hurston, used dialect and folk humor in their storytelling, but this left them open to charges of pandering to white racism.

Then, in 1952, an American writer—Ralph Ellison—produced a literary masterpiece that embraced black folk culture in all its richness, variety, and complexity while also exposing some educated blacks' disdain of it.

In Ellison's novel *Invisible Man*, the unnamed black narrator, an ambitious, bookish young man from the Deep South, finds himself in New York City. Expelled from his college, betrayed by his mentors, the narrator has lost his footing in the educated class. One day, in a moment of rebellion against his training, he buys a hot, buttered yam, a food associated with southern folk life, from a street vendor.

"I walked along munching the yam...overcome by a sense of freedom simply because I was eating walking along the street. It was exhilarating. I no longer had to worry about who saw me or what was proper...If only some-

FOLK OPERA. *Drafts of Porgy and Bess. In 1933 at Folly Beach, DuBose Heyward worked on the opera's libretto.*
PHOTO/WADE SPEEDS/DUBOSE HEYWARD PAPERS/SOUTH CAROLINA HISTORICAL SOCIETY



one from school or home who had known me would come along and see me now. How shocked they'd be! I'd push them into a side street and smear their faces with the peel. What a group of people we were, I thought. Why, you could cause us the greatest humiliation simply by confronting us with something we liked."

Toward the end of the novel, Ellison's narrator has retreated into an underground bunker to reflect. There he discovers a metaphor for his experience: "I am an *invisible* man." That is, his humanity is invisible to whites; but also he has been invisible to himself and his own culture.

The author Charles Johnson notes that Ellison gave "our age a new metaphor for social alienation." It is commonplace now, Johnson pointed, to invoke invisibility "when we talk about American blacks, and for any social group that we willingly refuse to see."

Since its publication, *Invisible Man* has inspired writers such as August Wilson, Charles Johnson, and Nobel laureate Toni Morrison, who have created characters painfully confronting slavery and segregation.

It could be said that DuBose Heyward and Julia Peterkin helped set the stage for this later flowering of African-American talent. For their time as literary artists, Heyward and Peterkin had revolutionary aims. They were among the first writers to show that black folk culture—Gullah culture—could be material for serious literature. Heyward, in particular, was sensitive to the beauty and creativity of Gullah art forms. Moreover, they were among the first to portray southern black characters sympathetically.

Yet there were still miles to go. Gullah accomplishments remained largely hidden from mainstream American society for decades.

Michael Allen, the National Park Service educator who has long promoted Gullah history, remembers his first encounter with invisibility.

"I grew up in Kingstree, South Carolina, in a Jim Crow segregated

community, in an African-American way of living," he says. "I attended a traditionally black university, South Carolina State, in Orangeburg. But in the summer of 1980 I began working out at Fort Sumter [National Monument], where the attitudes and perceptions and boundaries were different. Some people had problems with my working there; I seemed out of place. Yet who I am—from a cultural perspective—is all over the building of Fort Sumter and also part



Ralph Ellison.
PHOTO/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

of why the Civil War was fought in the first place. But in the eyes of some people, I was invisible. I wasn't part of their history."

So how did he cope with his invisibility? "Like Ellison's character in *Invisible Man*, I stepped back and tried to be objective," Allen says. "When I looked at the displays and exhibits and the book sales, I wasn't there. So I truly was invisible to the people who saw me there and to the story that we presented. No one who looked like me was incorporated in the process of education, and I needed to be part of that process."

He realized he had an opportunity. "What many of us have tried to do over the years is to show how the Gullah contributed to American history, so we can all—whites and blacks—understand and appreciate this culture, and we can all enjoy." ♡

The Charleston Renaissance

Before the Civil War, Charleston was a cultural capital of the South, boasting a number of well-known poets. However, the war financially ruined the southern aristocracy that had once sponsored and provided an audience for white artists.

Many of Charleston's fine homes survived the war, hurricanes, and the catastrophic earthquake of 1886. But in the early twentieth century it was a bedraggled backwater softened by lovely private gardens, a city absorbed in past glories. Visiting in 1905, Henry James called Charleston a "flower-crowned waste."

Some argued that the entire defeated South had entered a steep cultural decline. In a now-famous 1917 essay, H.L. Mencken, the most influential newspaperman and literary critic of his day, attacked the South as a "gargantuan paradise of the fourth rate." The region that once produced "Presidents and statesmen" had sunk after the Civil War into "a vast plain of mediocrity, stupidity, lethargy, almost of dead silence."

Mencken could be a snob and a sneering bully, but some southerners knew he had a point, however exaggerated. In 1920, a small group of Charlestonians decided to rebuild the state's cultural reputation, creating the Poetry Society of South Carolina, which eventually promoted a range of artistic activities. The society in 1921 published a *Yearbook* of poetry and prose by South Carolina writers, drawing favorable notice from critics. The society later brought distinguished authors such as Gertrude Stein, Carl Sandburg, and Amy Lowell to speak in Charleston.

The society also encouraged painters, historians, and folklorists who helped create a lively cultural scene that later became known as the Charleston Renaissance. ♡

The lowcountry's special gift

The “gift of story and song” runs through the African-American experience from slavery to the speeches of the first black president of the United States—and a portion of it emerged from the South Carolina lowcountry.

Performed by Gullah people, slave songs such as “Michael, Row the Boat Ashore,” “Roll, Jordan, Roll,” “Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Had,” and “Blow Your Trumpet, Gabriel” were first written down in the Port Royal area or Charleston during the Civil War. Later these songs were revised and popularized worldwide.

In 1862, a group of northern teachers, whites and blacks, were sent to Port Royal and nearby islands after the area had fallen to Union troops. A pair of these young teachers contributed to a historic book, *Slave Songs of the United States*, published in 1867, which codified the lyrics and melodies.

African-American spirituals became enormously popular in the late nineteenth century, when the Fisk Jubilee Singers, a group of black singers, toured the country, bringing this tradition for the first time to northern white audiences. Many Americans, then, had their first opportunity to admire the richness of black music and culture.

In 1903, the leading black intellectual of his day W.E.B. Du Bois proclaimed that among the treasures that slaves had brought with them to America was the “gift of story and song,” which had been mingled with

TO THEE WE SING. After her famous concert at the Lincoln Memorial in 1939, the opera singer Marian Anderson is congratulated by Harold L. Ickes, the Secretary of the Interior.
PHOTO/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



W.E.B. Du Bois.
PHOTO/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

that of Europeans.

It turned out that marshalling this gift of black Americans was central to the modern civil-rights movement.

Marian Anderson, a black woman, was considered the greatest

contralto of her time, and on Easter Sunday, 1939, she sang on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, performing a mix of classical selections and spirituals.

The Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) had refused to allow her to sing at Constitution Hall, Washington’s largest concert venue. In response, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt resigned from the DAR, and President Roosevelt gave permission for a concert on the Mall.

Seventy-five thousand people gathered to watch Anderson perform. With a bank of microphones in front of her, she looked out on senators, Cabinet ministers, and Supreme Court justices.

In her powerful, rich voice, she sang, “America,” but she changed a crucial phrase from “Of thee I sing” to “TO thee WE sing.” This seemed to express a common purpose with other black Americans of their patriotism to



the country that often scorned them. More than any other song Anderson performed that day, it had a terrific impact. Newsreels showed her singing in front of the huge stone statue of Lincoln, the Great Emancipator.

The 10-year old Martin Luther King, Jr., the son of an Atlanta minister and civil-rights leader, was keenly aware of this Lincoln Memorial performance and what it meant to the black community. Five years later, still a schoolboy, King wrote a speech for a contest in which he referred with admiration to Anderson's day on the Mall.

In October 1963, King similarly stood in front of a bank of microphones on the same steps of the Lincoln Memorial and delivered his famous "I Have a Dream Speech." Just before he calls for his own people's freedom ringing from every mountain-side in the land, he recited a portion of "America," but used the older version.

King's speech became the civil-rights movement's most famous declaration of purpose and a powerful second act to the Anderson performance of 1939.

A third act was performed in January 2009, when two days before Barack Obama became the first



CELEBRATION. Beyoncé Knowles sings "America" at the close of the "We are One" inauguration concert in January 2009 at the Lincoln Memorial. PHOTO/WADE SPEEDS/THE POST AND COURIER

African-American U.S. president, Beyoncé Knowles sang "America" on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial to an audience of millions. And then, in

his inauguration speech, President Obama offered reminders of Anderson and King's historic contributions on those steps. 🐦



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NEWS&NOTES

Lowcountry shrimpers study Alaskan success

In March 2009, five shrimpers from South Carolina traveled to Alaska to learn how spot prawn and salmon fishermen there address fishery-management, infrastructure, and business challenges.

Since the 1990s, South Carolina shrimp fishermen have been hit by an influx of imported, farm-raised shrimp, declining shrimp prices, increasing



South Carolina shrimpers observe how cold-water shrimp, including spot prawns and pink shrimp, are caught in Alaskan waters.

PHOTO/S.C. SEA GRANT EXTENSION PROGRAM

fuel and labor costs, and loss of fishing-industry infrastructure.

Alaska's salmon fishermen have confronted similar problems. In response, they organized strong industry associations to help create state and federal support, developed innovative marketing strategies, and worked with fishing communities to create much needed processing, storage, and distribution facilities and networks.

The shrimpers visited fishing communities of Juneau and Petersburg, Alaska, where they attended workshops on topics such as direct market-

ing to consumers, fisheries cooperatives, and building leadership skills. Shrimpers also met with state government officials in the governor's office and the Department of Commerce to learn about state and federal programs that help fishermen improve their business practices.

Amber Von Harten, fisheries specialist with the S.C. Sea Grant Extension Program, collaborated with the Alaska Sea Grant Advisory Program to organize the event.

"The trip was an eye-opener for the fishermen," says Von Harten. "Seeing first-hand the seafood processing and marketing operations there, and interacting with other commercial fishermen, helped them understand they are not alone in challenges they face as an industry. In Alaska, the industry was able to overcome challenges through coordinated efforts in industry leadership, fisheries policy, and marketing and branding. Participants came back energized to bring the South Carolina seafood industry together to work toward common goals for promoting the state's seafood."

This project was supported by a grant to Clemson University and the S.C. Sea Grant Extension Program from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Trade Adjustment Assistance, Intensive Technical Assistance Program. ♡

Thousands participate in statewide cleanup

About 7,300 volunteers across South Carolina participated in the 21st annual Beach Sweep/River Sweep on September 19 to clear litter from

beaches, rivers, lakes, marshes, and swamps. About 5,800 of those volunteers worked along the coast from Waties Island to Daufuskie Island, and many creeks and marshes in between. The event, organized by the S.C. Sea Grant Consortium and the S.C. Department of Natural Resources, is the largest one-day, volunteer-driven cleanup of its kind. In all, groups were expected to remove as much trash as last year, about 60 tons.

On Jeremy Creek in McClellanville, for instance, volunteers picked up debris along the waterway and on a small island. One volunteer brought two boatloads of trash from the island, and all of the litter



Buster Browne hauls trash collected from an island in Jeremy Creek during Beach Sweep/River Sweep. PHOTO/S.C. SEA GRANT CONSORTIUM

was sorted by type. More than one thousand pounds were hauled out of Jeremy Creek and the island, and volunteers were able to recycle about half of that.

Major sponsors for 2009 include Applied Technology & Management, BP Cooper River Plant, Charleston City Marina, Charleston Water System, Coastal Expeditions, Duke Energy Foundation, Mount Pleasant Waterworks, Ocean Conservancy, S.C. State Ports Authority, and Walmart Market 123. ♡

NEWS&NOTES

Workshop for educators focuses on climate change

In July 2009, the Center for Ocean Sciences Education Excellence-Southeast (COSEE-SE) coordinated its annual Ocean Sciences Education Leadership Institute.

The goal of the institute was to provide educators with the skills, tools, resources, and contact information for scientists so that they are equipped to transfer knowledge back to their classrooms.

Scientists from Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina attended the workshop, sharing their research through lectures, lab exercises, and field experiences. Participants included 22 formal and informal educators from North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia who spent a week at the Baruch Marine Field Laboratory in Georgetown, South Carolina.



Teachers look at marine sediments in paleoclimate cores drawn from salt marshes.
PHOTO/MARTHA GRAHAM, NEWBERRY HIGH SCHOOL

The week kicked off with keynote speaker, Jenna Hill, an earth scientist at Coastal Carolina University, who presented her research on evidence of icebergs off the coast of South Carolina. This topic stimulated discussions of past climate patterns — paleo-

climate — in marine sediments and ice cores. The remainder of the week, scientists and educators explored topics such as recent climate-change trends, sea-level changes, increased sea-surface temperatures and their relation to hurricanes, and ocean acidification.

Field experiences provided a first-hand look at ongoing research on climate-change patterns and included observing impacts of saltwater intrusion on fresh and saltwater marshes, obtaining salt-marsh cores to look for evidence of sea-level changes, and collecting zooplankton to discuss impacts of a changing climate on the food chain.

Planning is underway for two climate-change institutes in 2010. For more information, please contact Elizabeth Vernon Bell, marine education specialist, at (843) 953-2078 or elizabeth.vernon@scseagrant.org.

Southeast governors form South Atlantic Alliance

In October 2009, governors of four southeastern states announced an agreement to work together to better manage and protect ocean and coastal resources, ensure regional economic sustainability, and respond to disasters such as hurricanes. The agreement establishes the South Atlantic Alliance among North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, and Georgia. The alliance will leverage resources from the public and private sectors, business and industry communities, local governments, federal agencies, academic institutions, and non-governmental organizations. The agreement was signed by North Carolina

Gov. Bev Perdue, South Carolina Gov. Mark Sanford, Georgia Gov. Sonny Perdue, and Florida Gov. Charlie Crist.

The alliance's priority issues are:

- Healthy Ecosystems
- Working Waterfronts
- Clean Coastal and Ocean Waters
- Disaster-Resilient Communities

Rick DeVoe, executive director of the S.C. Sea Grant Consortium, is a member of the executive planning team. The Consortium has developed and is hosting a Web site for the alliance. For more information, visit www.southatlanticalliance.org.

Request for nominations: 2009 S.C. Environmental Awareness Award

Nominations are being accepted through December 18 for the 2009 S.C. Environmental Awareness Award, which recognizes South Carolinians doing extraordinary work for the environment. The award acknowledges outstanding contributions made toward the protection, conservation, and improvement of South Carolina's natural resources. An awards committee considers excellence in innovation, leadership, and accomplishments that influence positive changes. Committee members represent the S.C. Sea Grant Consortium, S.C. Department of Natural Resources, S.C. Forestry Commission, and S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control.

Guidelines and nomination forms are available online at www.scdhec.gov/environment/admin/envawareness/envawards.htm. For more information, contact Robin Stephens at (803) 896-8973 or stephers@dhec.sc.gov.



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EBBS & FLOWS

New Partners for Smart Growth Conference

*Seattle, Washington
February 4-6, 2010*

This conference includes a dynamic mix of plenaries, breakouts, implementation workshops, specialized trainings, and coordinated networking activities. Exciting tours of local model projects from Seattle and the Puget Sound Region will be featured. There will be 90 sessions and workshops with hundreds of speakers who will share insights, and strategies for making smart growth a success in your community. Visit www.newpartners.org for more details and to register.

2010 Land Grant and Sea Grant National Water Conference

*Hilton Head Island, South Carolina
February 21-25, 2010*

This conference provides opportunities for water scientists, engineers, educators, and managers to share knowledge and ideas, to identify and update emerging issues, and to network with leading researchers, educators, and innovators from academia, government, and the private sector. The conference is hosted by a team of educators from Land Grant and Sea Grant institutions around the nation. For more information, visit www.usawaterquality.org.

National Hurricane Conference

*Orlando, Florida
March 29-April 2, 2010*

The goal of the National Hurricane Conference is to improve hurricane preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation in order to save lives and property in the United States and the tropical islands of the Caribbean and Pacific. In addition, the conference serves as a national forum for federal, state, and local officials to exchange ideas and recommend new policies to improve emergency management. Visit www.hurricanemeeting.com for more information.

Subscriptions are free upon request by contacting: Annette.Dunmeyer@scseagrant.org

ATTENTION SCHOOL TEACHERS! The S.C. Sea Grant Consortium has designed supplemental classroom resources for this and past issues of *Coastal Heritage* magazine. *Coastal Heritage Curriculum Connection*, written for both middle- and high-school students, is aligned with the South Carolina state standards for the appropriate grade levels. Includes standards-based inquiry questions to lead students through explorations of the topic discussed. *Curriculum Connection* is available on-line at www.scseagrant.org/education.